MUSIC IN THE CLINIC

They told him the live music was “calming, soothing and relaxing for patients who were waiting to see their medical providers.” They also felt it enhanced the clinic atmosphere in subtle ways and facilitated nonmedical interactions between themselves and the patients, which, Silverman and Hallberg noted, “may facilitate rapport, trust and therapeutic alliance.” Some also commented on the significance of the music being live. “There’s an aspect of watching someone play or perform their talent that is interesting,” noted one staff member. “… having something to watch and appreciate adds so much to the visit.”

The researchers discovered some patients took to playing the piano in the waiting room when the musicians were not performing, which has led to more conversations with patients about music. In addition, they found patients often remain in the clinic after their appointments to listen to the music.

An article on Silverman and Hallberg’s qualitative research was published in the April 2015 issue of Musicae Scientiae. Hallberg hopes it may inspire additional attempts to integrate music into health care and further study of its impact. “Like any research, you hope that others will build upon it and take some of it to heart enough to explore the idea,” he says. “But that said, it’s not for every health care setting; it has to be the right space, right room and right amount of personal space.” – JEANNE METTNER

Instrumental care

The arts have always had a role at the Mill City Clinic since it opened across from the Guthrie Theater in 2008. In the beginning, it was primarily played by the visual arts. For example, the clinic installed large-scale two-dimensional pieces in its high-ceilinged lobby and two glass cases to hold three-dimensional pieces. “It is really part of the DNA of this clinic to have these elements,” says Jon Hallberg, MD, the clinic’s medical director and a primary care physician who has been caring for actors, musicians and visual artists for 20 years. “It makes sense that if we are going to take care of really creative populations that we have real art from the get-go.”

The clinic has also found a way to integrate music.

About six years ago, Hallberg began collaborating with Michael Silverman, director of music therapy at the University of Minnesota, who arranged to have doctoral students perform for patients in the waiting room as a community outreach component of their studies. They quickly discovered not all instruments were a good fit in the clinic—the cello and the flute, for example, proved to be too loud or their sound too piercing for the space. They settled on the acoustic guitar and electric piano, both of which could be volume-controlled. Now about a dozen students perform on those instruments in the clinic each year.

Silverman and Hallberg began to wonder whether the live music was having an impact. Silverman was aware of studies about patients’ perceptions. However, no one had looked at what staff members thought about having live music in their workplace.

To find answers, Silverman interviewed staff at the clinic—including the clinic manager, two medical assistants, a patient representative, two nurses, two physicians and a physician assistant.

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